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VA Announces New Simplified Process for Veterans to Receive Care for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

WASHINGTON, DC -U.S. Rep. Michael Arcuri (NY-24) applauded today's announcement by Veterans Administration (VA) Secretary Eric Shinseki that the federal agency will issue rules easing access to care and the claims process for veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The rule reduces the evidence needed if the PTSD claimed by a veteran is related to fear of hostile military or terrorist activity and is consistent with the places, types, and circumstances of the veteran's service.

"On the battlefield, the military pledges to leave no soldier behind," **said Arcuri**. "As a nation, it is our duty to ensure that when they return home, we leave no veteran behind. For too long, veterans who have been wounded psychologically have not received the same access to critical benefits they have earned in defense of our nation as those with physical injuries. The VA's decision today will reduce the burden of proof placed on our Veterans and enable more to seek care related to PTSD."

Under the new rule, VA will not require corroboration of a PTSD stressor related to fear of hostile military or terrorist activity if a VA psychiatrist or psychologist confirms that the stressful experience recalled by a Veteran adequately supports a diagnosis of PTSD and the Veteran's symptoms are related to the claimed stressor.

Previously, VA required non-combat veterans to provide proof that they experienced PTSD related to hostile military activity. This final rule simplifies the development that is required for these cases. VA expects the new rule to decrease the time it takes VA to decide disability claims and access to health care. PTSD is a recognized anxiety disorder that can develop from seeing or experiencing an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury to which a person responds with intense fear, helplessness or horror, and is not uncommon among war Veterans.

More than 400,000 Veterans are currently receiving compensation benefits for service-connected PTSD. If service connection for PTSD is established under the new rule, a Veteran disabled by PTSD will be entitled to disability compensation - a tax-free benefit paid for disabilities resulting from -- or made worse by -- injuries or diseases associated with active service.

Arcuri has long supported improving PTSD service and benefits - evidenced by his co-sponsorship of the COMBAT PTSD Act (H.R. 952) in May 2009, which focuses exclusively on creating a presumption of service-connected disability for veterans diagnosed with PTSD. Additionally, Arcuri introduced legislation (H.R. 3441) that would automatically enroll veterans into VA medical system and ensure every returning soldier receives the care and benefits they deserve.

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